

# Patch test



## Information for patients

Dermatology



**PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST





## What is patch testing?

Patch testing is a technique to find out whether your skin condition is caused, or made worse, by allergy to substances that may come into contact with your skin, e.g. cosmetics, substances at home, at work or in leisure activities.

## What does patch testing involve?

- **Four visits** to hospital are usually required, three if the patches are applied on a Thursday afternoon.
- **The first visit is for an assessment.** At this visit a specialist nurse or doctor will ask detailed questions about substances that might have come into contact with your skin. We can then choose which tests you need and if specialised items are needed, these can be ordered. It may be necessary to repeat some of the questions you have already been asked if you have been to a dermatology clinic before.
- The other visits are a series of 2 or 3 linked visits over a 5-6 day period for the patches to be applied, removed, marked, read and the results interpreted.
- If the visits fall over a weekend your parent will need to remove the patches at a specified time.

## What will I be tested to?

You will be tested to at least 50 standard substances commonly in contact with the skin, eg rubber chemicals, metals, perfumes and plants, and often to additional substances depending on your skin problem. You may be tested to some of your own work or home products. The standard substances vary from time to time depending on national advice and emerging allergens.

## What should I do if I can't make the appointments?

Please ring as soon as possible on **0114 271 2442** so that we can rearrange your visits.

## Are there any reasons why my tests may be postponed?

We may not patch test you if you:

- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have extensive eczema on your back
- have had sun exposure or used a sun bed over the previous 2 weeks
- are on a moderate or high dose of oral steroid tablets.

If any of these apply to you, contact us on **0114 271 2442** to rearrange your appointment.

## What should I bring to the patch test clinic?

### Please bring to the initial assessment appointment:

- **A list of medication:** any prescribed drugs you are taking.
- **All ointments and creams** you use, including over the counter creams you may have bought in a chemist.
- **Your own products:** substances you use at home to which you think you might be allergic e.g. toiletries, cosmetics, nail polish, perfumes, and hair care products. Please bring the package, which will usually list the contents, or write out the ingredients. Please especially bring items which you put on to the problem area of your skin.

- **Work chemicals:** if you think that substances at work may be aggravating or causing your rash, please bring samples in well-sealed labelled containers to your first appointment. Please also bring the Health and Safety Data sheets which will be available from work.

On the other visits please bring back any items or packaging that the doctor or nurse requests, either for testing or for reference.

## **Is there anything I should avoid doing before the tests?**

- Please do not expose your back to the sun in the 2 weeks before the tests. If necessary your tests may need to be delayed if you are going on a sunny holiday.

## **Is there anything I need to do, or avoid, during tests?**

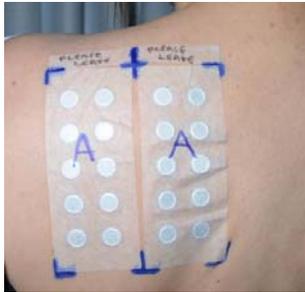
### **Things to avoid:**

- **Do not** get your back wet during the tests: please avoid baths, showers and swimming as these can invalidate the tests. It is best to wash down with a flannel, avoiding the test areas.
- **Do not** wear your best clothes as the marker ink may stain.
- **Do not** expose your back to the sun during this procedure.
- **Do not** do sport, or heavy physical work during the week of the tests as sweating can make the patches fall off or the markings disappear.

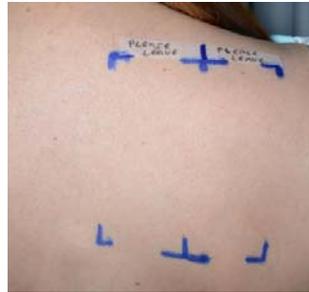
### **Things that can help:**

- Consider shaving your back on the morning your patches are due to be applied if you think the nurse might otherwise need to do this so that the patches will stick.

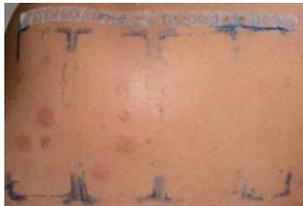
## Photographs of the patch testing process



Patches applied



Patches removed



Positive reaction

## What happens if my tests are negative?

It is possible that your patch tests will be negative. This is helpful since, as far as we can, we have eliminated contact allergy as a cause of your skin problem.

## What side effects may occur?

Side effects are rare, but include:

- Skin reddening and itching from positive test results or from the tape. This usually disappears after a few days.
- Persistent reaction: some positive test reactions (eg to gold), may last for up to a month.

- Flare-up of eczema: a positive patch test may be accompanied by a flare-up of existing or previous eczema.
- Pigment (colouring) change: an increase or decrease in pigment may be seen at the site of patch tests.
- Infection or scarring: these are rare.
- Allergy: very rarely, about 1 in 500 times, you may become allergic to one of the substances applied during patch testing. In practice this does not seem to cause a problem in the long term.
- Skin staining: sometimes substances, such as dyes, may stain the skin for a few days. This is normal and staining will disappear.

## **How are my test results stored?**

As well as documenting the results of your tests in your hospital notes and writing to your GP, we will also record the information about your patch test results on a computerised database. This database is accessed by the Dermatology Team at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals only. It is used for audit and research, and may be shared in an anonymised form with other centres. Audit and research are important, as they help us to ensure that high standards are maintained. It will not be possible to identify you from any shared information.



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